LENS5

Jenna Rendeiro

**Reader-Response:** *Out of the Dust* was familiar to me because I had to read it in 5th or 6th grade. Thinking back, I remember feeling it was boring and being uninterested in the plot. After reading it a second time for this class, I thought that this was the perfect opportunity to come up with ways in which I could engage students in this book. The lesson I created is geared more for after the reading is complete, but before reading and during reading are also important to structure for engagement. Teachers could begin by introducing the topic of sand storms, the Great Depression, Roosevelt, prose poems and even Oklahoma before ever diving into the book. Gaining that initial background knowledge by researching and discussing will set the initial interest in students that is needed for engagement. Then students could come up with predictions, make connections, and hold discussions throughout their journey through the book. *Out of the Dust* has a lot of strong themes and concepts that are interesting to explore. Students can gain many meanings from this book through interpreting the poems. *Pleasures* suggests that when a poem is spoken in the voice of a child, it gives us empathy. Moreover, I believe that putting so many poems within this book, it was best to put them in the perspective of a young adult because the age relation can then lead to motivation. Poems are written such a way that students who enjoy more musical genres or struggle to focus when they are faced with a lot of words on a page can read them with ease. *Pleasures* states that words in poems “express general truths in ways that provide other more detailed and more ambiguous meanings…all poems do have meanings and encourage students to think” (265). It is also generally relatable because it is written from the point of view of a 14 year old girl that is coping with hardships. I think this is important because students will get to explore the feelings within Billie Jo’s head and empathize with her. Throughout the story she has almost ever problem imaginable: problems with her parents, money, mistakes, death, regret, choice to stay or leave, physical deformity, and accepting a parent with another partner. While these are all really deep topics, I think it is important for influential adults to educate children about healthy ways to cope and face troubles that they will encounter. Throughout my lesson plan I will provide examples of appropriate responses.

**Purpose:** To create an engaging and interesting way to use *Out of the Dust* within the classroom.

**Audience:** Students/ other teachers

Genre: Lesson Plan

**Engagement:** By creating this lesson plan, I practiced using other resources that relate to a book in order to help students generate a deeper meaning. It was also advantageous, as a future educator, to create a lesson that I feel would greatly benefit both general and special education students.

**Lesson: *Out of the Dust:* Traveling in Time Back to the Dust Bowl**

**Big Question:** Does Billie Jo ever get out of the dust bowl? Explain your reasoning.

**Materials:** *Out of the Dust*, letters written to President and Mrs. Roosevelt during the Great Depression, “Mental Itinerary,” pencil, journal

**Objectives:**

* The students will use the letters and photos provided to gain further insight on the Great Depression and what it was like in dust bowls in order to discuss how these hardships affected people.
* With the use of their books students will complete their “Mental Itinerary” in order to discover the meanings in *Out of the Dust*.
* The students will engage in a group discussion about their experiences in the dust bowl in order to answer the big question.

**Activities:**

1. Have students analyze the photos and read the letters written by children that were in the midst of the Great Depression.
   * Tell them to be thinking about how those conditions would make them feel.
   * Next, students will discuss their thoughts with a peer next to them before opening up a group discussion.
2. “Mental Itinerary” worksheet (next page.)
3. Come back together as a class for a group talk about their experience before writing a journal entry to answer the Big Question.

**Assessments:**

* Listen to what students are saying during discussions. If they are off track, redirect them and clear up and misconceptions before moving on.
* Collect students’ “Mental Itineraries” and assess whether or not they had any trouble organizing concepts and ideas in this activity. You can also look for this during the discussion of the worksheet in class.
* Journal entries on the Big Question.

Operation: Expose Billie Jo

Trustee: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Mental Itinerary

You, my friend, are on a mission. A mission to discover the Big Question: Does Billie Jo ever get out of the dust bowl? –But wait- could this question have a secret meaning? As you brave the journey ahead, be strong. I know your brain has the power to discover the important meanings we need.

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*Time\*\*\*\*warp\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

Wow what a crazy ride. You just arrived in a strange looking place. You’re dizzy from all that spinning and wind. What happened? What are you wearing? And what is that crunch in your mouth?... no way. It can’t be…Oklahoma, 1934.

Take a moment to close your eyes and soak it in. Explain what you see, feel, hear, taste, and are thinking:

(I must have gotten here with a time machine! These clothes are really weird and worn out. The wind is blowing in my face and I can hear it too. It looks really bare here and I got sand all over myself. I see some houses around. They don’t look anything like my house. They look like they are about ready to fall to the ground. I sure feel bad for the people around here. It doesn’t seem like they have much of anything. I wonder if I’ll get to talk to anyone or see Billie Jo from the book. All I know is, I don’t want to be caught in a sand storm.)

As you’re searching for someone to talk to, you can’t help but be bothered with these two questions that keep running through your head. One is for Billie and one is for her father. What are the two questions and how might they respond if you were to ask them? You can include evidence from the book:

(1. Billie Jo, why did you decide to turn around and come home after you went all that way on the train?

She might say that after talking to the man, she realized that both she and her dad were always scared of being alone. Even though she was mad at him and things weren’t the same since the accident, she still loved him and they needed each other. She says, “even with the double sorrow of his grief and my own, he had kept a home until I broke it.” (202)

2. The student would then do one for her father.)

While you’re there, it might be easier to put yourself in Billie Jo’s position. List at least 3 feelings that she had throughout the book:

(sad, scared, angry, confused, jealous, pain, hope, love, compassion, fear, happy)

As times change, people value different tangible items. Name some of the things Billie’s family valued. Think about what other values people have (family, friends, etc.) and write down those values as well.

(They valued the clothes that they had, the tools and trucks for farming, the piano, their house and furniture, rain, and the small store they had. Also, they really valued each other, their friends, memories, education, and Louise.)

FINALLY! You see Billie Jo and run up to her as quickly as you can! The sand is making it hard to run, but you can’t stop after all this time. As you’re making your way to her, you remember something she says in the book- “And I know that all the time I was trying to get out of the dust, the fact is, what I am, I am because of the dust. And what I am is good enough. Even for me.” (222)- With this in mind, you reach her and get to ask if she ever got out of the dust. You are standing face to face, in the sand, in the breeze, she pulls her hat back from her pale face with her scarred hands and says: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

(The dust is more than sand; it is all the things that shaped my life. I wouldn’t be the person I am if I didn’t endure the things I did. Times were hard enough as they were and they got even worse when we lost ma and the baby. Daddy worked hard, but he even did things that I resented him for. Sometimes you feel like you can’t forgive someone or that things aren’t fair. Running away from your problems doesn’t fix them on the inside and, truth is, the things you can’t change are always going to change you. It is up to you to make it good or bad. The dust is still a part of my life, but the farm is doing much better lately, and so am I.)

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*Time\*\*\*\*warp\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

**What just happened? Was that a dream?**

**Letters to President Roosevelt During the Great Depression**

**A twelve year old girl**

Barboursville, W. Va. August, 23, 1934

Dear President & Wife;

This is the first time I or Any of my people wrote Any president. And I am here to ask you for $8.oo to get me a winter coat. This may seem very strange for a girl 12 years old to do but my father is a poor honest working Laundry man and he works on a percentage a week we have 10 in our family and my father does not have enough money to get him a bottle of Beer. He is a democrat and did all he could to have you voted. The N.R.A. [National Recovery Administration] is coming alone fine. As little as I am I know just as much about depression as a grown person. I'm 12 years old and am in the 8th grade curly hair Brunette & brown eyes & fair complexion & weigh 76 lbs. Hoping to hear from you soon I remain your true Democrat

J. A. G.

P.S We would have loved if Mrs. Roosevelt when she was visiting Logan to come around to our small town she was only about 60 miles from here.

**A fourteen year old girl**

Dows, Iowa  March 24, 1934

Dear Mis. Roosevelt

I am a girl 14 yrs. old I am asking a favor of you & a big one to. Will you please send me some cloths or some money for some If you can. My girl friend wrote to. we both don't have any cloths. The kids at school all make fun of you if you can't dress just so please let me here from you & please dont publish this letter or us girls shall get a terriable beaten. May god bless you

**A Nine Year Old Girl**

[Boston, Massachusetts acknowledged Apr. 27, 1938]

My dear Lady,

I am a little girl 9 years of age, I have a mother, and father, and two smaller sisters.

About four months now, my father opened a small grocery store . . . It isn't easy for him to pay all of his bills, because his money is very little. Nobody seems to help us. And sometimes my mother cryes because maybe we'll loose the store. I'm always sorry because I'm still young and I can't help much. I was thinking of You, because I always see You in the paper with a smile in Your face. And I know that You have a kind heart. I thought if I wrote to You, maybe You would help us, with a little money and then with Your help I can help my father.

Your's truly,

M. K.

**A child in Kansas**

Galena, Kansas February 5, 1936

Mr Mrs Franklin D Roosvelt

Dear sir I am riling you about my Little Brother who sick see if could get you help send him to some hospial i see in paper where help other Little children i dont see how could Be any worse of then my Little Brother is my Little Brother be 5 years old June he cant walk are talk Are he cant feed his self he suck a Bottle only when mother feed him he just sit propt in chair that is all the county Dr said is just had him took where Be operated he thought get all rite some says he got Pralizes of Bone some say it from his spine he had Ricket when he Little never grew very much he had very Big now my dady had got any money send to hospital I thought rite ask you help send him mamma take up Capper hospital if had money pay way up there . . . hate see go through Life way he is my dady was on Relif roll Last Year . . . i am just m year old go stone school cherkee Gouty Kansas and our county seat Clombis Kansas and our county Dr name is Dr H. H. B. Clumbis Kansas if dont Believe about my Little Brother you write ask him . . . that reason riling you see help raise money for mamma take him away

hoping hear from you soon

tell me what think about him as do hate see him go through Life way he is i thought maby you might help as you other Little Children so will close hoping hear you soon send my Letters to T. L. Galena Kansas R z in care E. L. Galena Kansas R z that my dady name i be shore get your Letter from T. L. to Mr Mrs Roosevelt

ans soon

T. L.

**A Seventeen Year Old Boy**

Cleveland, Ohio November 10, 1940

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt:

I am a boy of 17, I quit school 2 years ago in order to find a job. Since my dad died 3 years ago we haven't been able to do so good. We stretched his insurance money so far as it would go, but now we have to face it. We are behind 2 months in our rent and the 3rd falling due this Wednes¬day, the 13th. We pay $15 a month for 4 rooms. There are 5 of us, mother, 3 boys and myself. I really wouldn't be writing this, but I can't see our¬selves evicted from our house. We've got till Wednesday to get either all or at least a half of our rent paid up. It would be all right if it was only me because I could take care of myself one way or another. My mother can't get work because she just recovered from tuberculosis and must rest. I am afraid that if nothing comes up I will turn to crime as a means of getting financial help.

My little brothers are shoeshiners. They go out at night and shine shoes. They go mostly in beer gardens. Their little money even helps. You might say, why don't we go on relief, well you just can't convince my mother on that. She said she would rather starve than get relief.

I am working as a grocery store clerk at $8.00 a week. We could get along on this in summer but not in winter on account of the coal problem.

I was wondering that maybe you could loan us about $35.00 or more, we could get on our feet again and once again hold up our heads. We will greatly appreciate this second start in life with all our hearts.

Will you please be so kind as to answer this letter in some way. And will you please congratulate your husband for us for winning the election. I read all about how angry Hoover and all the rest were about not letting your husband have a 3rd term. The reason for that is because they weren't even good enough to be re elected for a second term and are angry. We all have faith in our president.

Thanks Ever So Much

V.B.F.

P.S. Please, again I say, try to answer this letter before Wednesday some¬how. I'll be praying every night for your loan. I'll give you $1.00 a month with interest until it is all paid up.

P.S., The reason I marked it peronel is that I was afraid it might be thrown out by your secretaries before you even read it.

Letters Retrieved from: <http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/learning_history/children_depression/help_president.cfm>

Photos retrieved from: http://www.weru.ksu.edu/new\_weru/multimedia/dustbowl/dustbowlpics.html



